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Dabney, Charles William

The municipal university

[Cincinnati?]

[1914?]

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The Municipal University

by

Charles William Dabney

President of the University of Cincinnati

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Let me begin with this quotation:

"Democracy is on its trial, and no one knows how it will stand the ordeal. * * What its critics now affirm is that its preferences are inveterately for the inferior. * * Vulgarity enthroned and institutionalized—this, they tell us, is our irremediable destiny. * * When democracy is sovereign, its doubters say, nobility will form a sort of invisible church, and sincerity and refinement, stripped of honor, precedence and favor, will have to vegetate on sufferance in private corners.

The best of us are filled with the contrary vision of a democracy stumbling through every error till its institutions glow with justice and its customs shine with beauty. Our better men shall show the way and we shall follow them; so we are brought around again to the mission of the higher education in helping us to know the better kind of man whenever we see him."

From the Proceedings of the National Association of State Universities, Vol. 12, 1914.

So says William James. To stand this test, the democracy must educate leaders to show the way, and followers to follow them. This is the mission of the college. Let us, then, take this, the great American doctrine, as the starting point for our study of the latest educational development in the democracy, the municipal university.

The progressive democratization of education is the most remarkable thing in the history of America. It has been a steady process from the common school up to the normal school and college. As fast as a new type of school has become necessary, it has been established, and its opportunities have been extended more and more widely and freely to all the people. Thus progressively have the American people placed the opportunity for education within the reach of all. Is not this the grandest achievement of our civilization, or of any civilization?

But what of equality of opportunity for the higher or professional education? We agree that the chance to get this education should also be within the reach of all. We believe, moreover, that colleges and universities which offer these opportunities should be so placed and arranged as to arouse the ambition of all the youth, and give them the chance to get that liberal, technical and professional training which will qualify them for the highest service to their generation. The question then is, have we actually placed the facilities for the liberal, technical and professional education within the reach of all our American youth?

The "log college," as it was called in early days, or the "fresh water college," as we now call the private literary college, has done great work for the country. Located near

the homes of the people, it provided the opportunity for a higher education for many boys and girls who otherwise would not have gotten it. In its courses of liberal studies, it trained most of our great men.

But it is important that we should recognize the fact also that the respect for learning, bred into this people by these old colleges, created a sort of class feeling in America. This class feeling is, after all, a very simple thing; it is merely like seeking like. Church colleges and private institutions tend inevitably to produce it. The culture that follows several generations of education will do this even more than wealth. Democracy means an honest homogeneity, and such homogeneity cannot be produced unless all people have an equal opportunity for the higher and the professional education. The free public college and the state university were necessary, therefore, to save democracy in America from class stratification. Our state universities are thus the best witnesses for our democracy, and our most characteristic institutions. As the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain has said, "The American state university is the grandest achievement of democracy in the last hundred years."

But all these, your universities, cannot meet the needs of all our youth. Take a single state for illustration—Ohio has three state universities attended by seven thousand students. There are this year about twenty thousand students in the other colleges in the state. The number of students in these colleges has doubled in the last ten years, and it will undoubtedly again double in the course of the next decade. In less than twenty-five years, this number may be expected to be, at least, one hundred thousand. These

thousands of students come chiefly from the villages and country districts. The cities are growing so rapidly that they will soon contain more than half the population of the state. They are building elementary and high schools for the education of their children, but how shall they give their young people the opportunity for the higher education? A few of the large cities have private universities located in their midst. When they serve the needs of all the people, these universities must be commended for doing an important part of this work. But what shall we do for the youth of the cities having no colleges freely open to all? To take an illustration from Ohio again: Cleveland has a great private institution to educate the people of that city, but Cincinnati, having no such private institution, has chosen to educate its youth in a publicly supported college. Out of twenty-two hundred students at the University of Cincinnati, over fifteen hundred are residents of the city. In a recent year, only two hundred and fifty-five college students were sent away from Cincinnati to institutions of the grade of its university. An investigation of the financial condition of the families of the students at the University of Cincinnati teaches that if this city had no university giving free instruction, not more than five hundred of these would be able to go off to college, and one thousand, at least, would be left at home without the higher or professional education. It is evident, therefore, that blessed as we are in Ohio with a large number of excellent colleges, they could not train all the students of Cincinnati who seek the higher education.

This, then, is the *raison d'être* of the municipal university. To believe in democracy, to believe in the equality

of opportunity for all in the development of their lives, is to believe in the municipal university, the one thing needed to complete our American system of higher education.

But the city needs its university just as much as its people need it. In the development of every nation there comes the period of the cities. The age of the city has arrived for us. Originally a confederation of states, America is fast becoming a republic of cities. The most important thing revealed by the last census was the fact that the rural population has now dwindled to 52 in 100. In the middle states, it has decreased to 40 and in some states to 35 per cent. of the population. In Ohio, for example, while the total population has increased 15 per cent. in each of the last three decades, and the urban population 30 per cent. in each, the rural population actually decreased four per cent. the first decade and six and one-half per cent. the second decade. Everywhere the urban population is increasing ahead of the rural and in most of the old states the total rural population is steadily decreasing. Do what we can, by the improvement of country life and the development of rapid transit, to check this rush of the people to the cities, it must inevitably go forward. The drift of the people cityward cannot be checked because it is natural and necessary. It is probable that we shall some day have more and larger cities in America than in any country in the history of the world.

If not the chief unit, the city has already become the intensest unit of self-government, for it is the heart of the nation, determining largely the health of the whole body. Here the pulse of the great democratic body can be counted best, and by its action the statesman-physician will diagnose

the health of the whole body. In the city are wealth, youth and power; in the city also are disease, vice, greed and graft. The city is the vital organ of the democracy. The preservation of its health and strength is the supreme question of the hour.

The municipal university, therefore, is needed as the intellectual and spiritual dynamo of the city. The city, as well as the nation, is awakening to a recognition of the necessity for intelligent and righteous leadership. It has passed through its period of corruption and shame and entered upon its period of idealism, of vision and scientific re-construction. Hand in hand with the demand for the purification of the ballot and of city administration, goes the demand for higher ethical and educational standards. The university must make the standards, and it must train the leaders. Who are the men who have stirred the people of the cities to seek this new life and to build these new and fairer institutions? Everywhere they are college men, men who caught the flame of their enthusiasm at the altar of Alma Mater.

The old university was a thing apart, a city set on a hill. When it occasionally marched out of its doors to visit the people, music and banners celebrated the event. Some thirty years ago, it took on what was called "university extension." The very name "extension" implied that the university needed to be set free to serve. "University extension" was, however, the beginning of a new era in the life of universities, developing in them a consciousness of their duty to the public. The service of some of our great state universities is a splendid illustration of what can be done by such institutions to promote the agricultural, industrial, political and

social, as well as the educational, interests of their states. In similar manner, the university mind is becoming the city mind, and the city itself is becoming a university for training its own servants. Now the municipal university is needed to develop this city-mindedness and to organize this study of the city's problems.

Since the application of science to government and industrial life has become so extensive, it is necessary to educate men in an increasing number of new professions. Fifty years ago, there were only about five learned professions; now there are more than fifty, and new ones are constantly developing. No longer do we believe that a man who has had an academic education is thereby qualified to direct a bank, manage a factory, or run a railroad. In business and industrial enterprises of all kinds, the demand for experts is constantly increasing. Experts are indispensable for most industries, and desirable in all. Mere experience in practical work is no longer sufficient. In one profession after another, we have learned to train experts not only in the theory, but in the practice as well. Fifty years ago, there were but two or three schools of applied science or technology in this country, now we are building these schools everywhere, and they can hardly meet the demands of the governments and the corporations.

For the same reasons, cities are beginning to see that because a man is a clever fellow and a good political worker, he is not thereby qualified to manage the finances, to direct the education, or to handle the water supply of a great city. A demand is growing up for municipal, as well as industrial,

experts. We are training men today for nearly all the services except that of the municipality.

Who, then, shall train public servants for the city? Shall the city rely upon state and private institutions to perform the task? If it does, only the sons of the well-to-do can get these positions. To exclude the poor from the opportunities of the higher education, or to train them at the bounty of the wealthy, is surely repugnant to our democratic ideas. It is more American to provide the means of instruction and training at public expense and at home, and so enable all qualified youth to use them freely. Experience shows that the city must look to its own men and women to do its work, for only thus can it get the workers it requires.

The city must have a spiritual head, and this spiritual head should be a university. The private university may do much to help the city and its schools; a state university, especially one like that of New York State, can do more, but a home municipal university, a part of the city's life, can do most to stimulate the city's education and the city's life. The ideal head is the municipal university, the capstone of the city's educational system. The justification of the municipal university is the need of the city itself.

The advantages of a large city as a location for a university need not be explained here. The facilities afforded by libraries, museums, art galleries, hospitals and various social and political institutions of the city, and by industrial laboratories, commercial establishments, and manufactories of the community, are well appreciated by the universities. But the advantages of making the local institution a municipal university, that is, a university supported and controlled by the

city, are perhaps not so apparent. Undoubtedly, there are disadvantages as well as advantages in this arrangement. Let us consider both sides of the question.

In the first place, what are some of the advantages accruing to the municipal university over those of the university in the city? In general, they are the same as those of the state university compared with the private institution. The first advantage is the great one of regular, permanent, financial support based upon the steadily increasing property values of the city itself. Incomes from private endowments are constantly shrinking, with the result that these funds must be constantly added to. Like the state university, the municipal university can have a mill tax, the best method ever invented for supporting an institution. It has been suggested that such a tax will diminish the interest of private citizens in endowing the institution, in giving buildings and making other donations to it. Undoubtedly, the tendency will be in this direction. State universities do not receive large private donations, though there are conspicuous exceptions to this rule, like the University of Virginia. As a matter of fact, in the experience of the few municipal colleges in existence, the interest of private donors depends entirely upon the manner in which the institutions are managed and the appeal made for them. Every municipal university ought to be supported both by private endowments and public tax. It should have an endowment fund association made up of leading citizens, whose business it is to solicit bequests, endowments, scholarships and other funds, as well as donations of buildings and equipments. There is every reason why all the people should, through the public tax, contribute their share to the support

of the municipal college, but this is no reason why those having surplus wealth should not also contribute largely to its upbuilding. If it had to choose between public support and private endowment, however the municipal college would certainly prefer public support as the surest means of getting an increasing income with which to maintain an institution competent to do the educational work of a growing modern city.

There is, moreover, everything to be gained by the municipal relation in making the work of an institution both effective in the direct education of the citizen and in the service of the city. The municipal university is a vital organ of the body politic, a member of the family of the city, and not a visitor in that family. It has all the advantages of being a part of the city's educational, social and political organization. It has an immense advantage, besides, in that all the citizens feel that the university belongs to them. Free tuition, or tuition at low rates, is, of course, a great aid in popularizing and democratizing the higher education.

But, perhaps, the greatest advantage of the municipal relation is that this connection gives the university, on its side, the right to ask the cooperation of every other city department and institution, thus opening them to its professors and students, and that it gives the city and its institutions, on their side, the right to ask the help of the university in all appropriate matters. If the object of the municipal university is to train men in real life for service in life, then no means can be more effective for realizing this purpose than this relation of the municipal university to the city and community. The influence and prestige gained by serving and cooperating with the city renders it easy also to secure the cooperation

of the private institutions and industrial corporations of the district. They are eager to join a system which represents all the people in their aspirations for intellectual and moral improvement, and higher efficiency in every department of their life.

As this development is somewhat new in the cities, perhaps some explanation of the cooperative methods of the municipal university may be interesting. In the first place, all the city's institutions, its schools, its libraries, its hospitals, its health board, its asylums, its public works, as well as its financial and administrative departments, are by this method opened up for the study of the university professors and students under the cooperative plan. In the second place, and as a result of granting these privileges, the city and its institutions have the right to call upon the university for assistance in testing old methods, or for advice in planning new work. Let me give a few illustrations of the workings of the cooperative system in both of these ways.

The most important part of the city's life is, of course, the school. The first duty of the university is to stimulate and build up the educational system. If the municipal university has a college for teachers, or a similar department, it can easily arrange to use the public schools for training new teachers. No special practice school can equal the real public school for this purpose.

But the college can help the schools in many ways besides training teachers. Its faculty is a board of experts to advise the Board of Education of the city, whenever called on, with regard to courses of study and methods of teaching. The professor of elementary education in the college may well be the

head supervisor of that department and examine and test the teachers for appointment and promotion. The professor of secondary education should perform a similar service for the high schools. This professor should also be the director of school affiliations and secretary of admissions for the university, and thus have control of the whole system of schools upon which the institution rests. As the university is the capstone of the city's educational system, the college for teachers should be the head of the public school system. There are possibilities here beyond the imagination.

The relations of the municipal university to the public libraries should also be intimate. The university library may be made the scholar's reference library of the city, and to this end might be a department of the city library itself. Where there are branch libraries, they should be used as centres of extension work.

The extension work of a municipal university can, by reason of these relations, be made much more effective than that of the university in the city, or the university at a distance, for this work is then directly under the eye of the faculty, who can provide facilities greatly superior to those of the private institutions. In fact, the external class work of the municipal university can be made to correspond in method and results to the internal work, and full credit given for it, thus extending the university over the whole city. On the other hand, there is not the same need in a municipal university for a correspondence department, since all students can come, either to the university itself, or to these extramural centres.

If the university has a college of medicine, and a department of social science, it may establish cooperative relations with all the hospitals and philanthropic institutions of the city. The faculty of the medical college should constitute a large part, at least, of the staff of the hospitals, and do the laboratory and investigational work for them. It is universally agreed by authorities on medical education that the teaching hospital is always the best hospital. All good health, medical and surgical practice is based on science, and it can make no progress without the aid of the scientific laboratory. Such work should be under university direction. The health board of the city will furnish training ground for sanitarians and physicians. The social science department of the university may make itself, if not the organic, still the real scientific and spiritual head of all the private, as well as the public, charity societies, directing their investigations, studying their problems and training its students in the settlements, asylums and other places where relief work is carried on.

The possibilities of cooperation with the city's own departments are, of course, unlimited. The university can serve the administrative department by holding civil service examinations. It should have a municipal reference library to supply information on municipal affairs to the members and committees of council, to city officers and citizens. This library, if located in the city hall, will provide a place where officers and committees can meet and get expert assistance and reliable statistics. The relation thus established will produce the best results in legislation. It is evident that such a library will also become a valuable laboratory for professors and students.

The chemical and other laboratories of the university become, at once, the laboratories for testing and investigating all conceivable questions for the city. The bureau of city tests examines all the materials bought by the various departments of the city, with regard to strength, chemical composition and commercial value. The budget and expenditures afford many problems for study. The engineering works, highways, sewers, water works, gas works, transportation systems, etc., can be utilized by the engineering college for the training of its students; and the heads of these city departments will, in turn, use the laboratories and the experts in the college as they need them. The department of public works becomes, for example, a partner of the engineering college in training young men for the service of the city. The city is thus a great factor in the success of the cooperative course for educating engineers.

Such are some of the methods of the municipal university. Its theory of service to the public is the same as that of the modern state university, though its work differs as the field differs. Enough has been said to show that because of its close relation to the city government and the public and private institutions of the city, and because of its proximity to a variety of factories and commercial establishments, the municipal university can carry on more cooperative work than any other university. These conditions create the opportunity and the duty of the municipal institution.

The disadvantages and difficulties of the municipal university are the same as those of the state university. Being dependent upon the public for support, both classes of institutions must be responsive to the will of the public represented by the state or city government, and both are, therefore, subject to what we commonly call political control. Public taxation is the simplest, fairest, and wisest method of raising funds to support a public cause, and some public control must go with the tax. The boards of management are, therefore, appointed by governors or mayors, or elected by the people. The position of the municipal university today, in respect to political control, is just about that of the state university twenty or thirty years ago. The state university had to undergo a period of political disturbance, now happily passed, except for a few newer western institutions, and the municipal college may have to stand the same treatment. As the people of the states had to learn how to eliminate politicians from their university affairs, so the people of the cities will learn to safeguard their institutions. Apparently the cities are learning this lesson rapidly and the indications are that the municipal universities will have much lighter attacks of these diseases of childhood than did the state universities.

The democracy everywhere sacrifices efficiency for freedom and opportunity—the people must learn how to educate themselves to do everything for themselves. The democracy is a school, and it is now learning how to support and direct its own schools. How rapidly and successfully it is learning this lesson, our great and improving systems of schools and our magnificent, growing state universities testify. As the state universities have succeeded, so will the municipal successful course, gaining everywhere by its experience.

Such is a brief statement of the case for the municipal university as I see it.

May I be permitted to say, at this point, that I am not by any means advocating the establishment of municipal universities in all large cities. Where large private institutions already exist, they will, I believe, learn to do much of this public service and cooperative work, though they may not be able to do it under as favorable conditions as the city's own university. Institutes, colleges and other smaller institutions will do parts of it. But with the development of cities in new places, there will be more municipal colleges. Akron, Ohio, is a striking case. The municipal university is coming where it is needed and when it is needed. Precisely the same forces which produced the state university will produce the municipal college. It is the latest product of our democratic education.

We have found, thus, that the municipal university is needed to democratize thoroughly the higher education in the cities. If we believe that the democracy must educate itself, then we must have municipal universities just as we have state universities, to put the highest education within the reach of the humblest citizen of the city. The training it gives is parallel with that of the state university, but will be different as the work of the city is different. No matter how efficiently organized the private institution may be, the municipal university is more intimately bound up with its community. No matter how large and complete a state university may be, it cannot educate all the people of the cities. The municipal university, by the very conditions of its existence, is inseparably united to the life of the people of the city. It differs from the university in the city in that its relation to the city is one of participation in the life of which it is a

vital part, rather than cooperation with a life of which it is independent. A part of the city society, the municipal university is a vital organ of the body politic; it is, in fact, the brain directing all the other organs, nourished by them, and stimulating them in return.

But the municipal university has a reason for existence aside from its service to the municipality. The ultimate reason for the existence of both the city and the state university is the development of men. The final test of all institutions is the educational test. The important question to be asked about every human institution is, "What is it doing for the making of better men?" Every city, therefore, ought to be a great educational institution in which no laws or customs inconsistent with this, the city's chief business, could be possible, and in which no man could live and not know the uses of Knowledge and the power of Truth. This we believe to be the foremost reason for the existence of the municipal university—that the city as a whole may be a great institution, not only to conserve every human interest, but also to develop every human being within its boundaries. The purpose of the municipal university is to teach men the Truth, that they may be effectively free.

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